THE CANCER BURDEN: AFRICA

Wednesday, October 30, 2019 | 6:00pm – 8:00pm
Permanent Mission of Rwanda | 124 East 39th Street | New York City


Co-hosting with Ambassadors Rugwabiza, Mohammed and Bessho will be Ambassador Sally Cowal, Senior Vice President, Global Cancer Control at the American Cancer Society. Ambassador Cowal will share the Society's global strategy and what the Society is doing with partners in Africa to combat the disease.

THE CHALLENGE

Each year, there are 811,000 new cases of cancer and 534,000 deaths from cancer in Sub-Saharan Africa. An estimated 1.45 million Africans are living with cancer diagnosed within the last five years. Due to late diagnosis and low access to treatment, cancer is about twice as lethal in Sub-Saharan Africa as in the United States. The number of new cancer cases in Africa is expected to double by 2040 to more than 1.6 million annually. There is also a high burden of infections that can cause or increase cancer risk, such as HPV, HBV, and HIV; an increase in behavioral risk factors such as tobacco and alcohol use, obesity, poor diet, and lack of exercise; environmental and occupational exposures; and poor infrastructure for food storage, water, and sanitation.

There are structural challenges that limit effective cancer prevention and care in Sub-Saharan Africa, stemming at the most basic level from a lack of resources and awareness. Stigma, fear, and misunderstanding about cancer add additional challenges, as does the financial burden of the disease on individual and families. Furthermore, for decades, a focus on infectious disease has limited investment in chronic and non-communicable diseases. This means that governments are now building an entire cancer care continuum – including training, facilities, treatment, public education and patient support – at a pace that cannot keep up with demand for services.

THE SOLUTION

Despite these challenges, there are significant changes underway that are cause for some optimism. Awareness and interest in cancer is increasing in Africa, and along with it, increased government and private investment. The last 10 years have seen the establishment of new public and private cancer centers, oncology training programs, civil society organizations, and increasing health insurance coverage for cancer care. Governments are also expanding access to HPV vaccination as well as community awareness and education.

For more than a century, the American Cancer Society has been a leader in the fight against cancer. Having made tremendous progress in saving lives and reducing the threat of the disease in the US, we are uniquely positioned to lead global efforts to transform cancer from deadly to treatable, and from treatable to preventable. ACS is working with global partners to collectively address the global cancer burden and devise culturally appropriate solutions in regions where the epidemic is the greatest, including Sub-Saharan Africa. This work spans the entire cancer continuum including prevention, access to care and treatment, patient support and capacity building.

Because at the American Cancer Society, we believe that WHERE you live should not determine IF you live.